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ESSAY PRIZE WINNER

Mapping the Settlement Period: Mnemotopographies in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*

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Mapping is a tricky business, and one that frequently raises questions about borders, perspectives, ownership, and the naming of places.[1] Despite their seemingly neutral birds-eye view on the world, cartographic maps are not impersonal representations of the region they depict but exhibit specific perspectives and agendas. '[F]ar from holding up a simple mirror of nature that is true or false', the cartographer Brian Harley asserts, 'maps re-describe the world. [...] in terms of relations of power and the cultural practices, preferences and priorities' (Harley 2001: 35). Consequently, maps can also be studied for the insight they provide into the cultural organisation of knowledge and power. However, despite the growing consciousness that various cultures map their world through oral and written narratives, most interdisciplinary studies on mapping still focus on cartographic material. Yet in recent years, the narrative-cognitive maps created by Old Norse-Icelandic texts have started to receive more scholarly attention. Gísli Sigurðsson (2015; 2018) discusses knowledge about the geography of the British Isles, Greenland, and Vinland that is expressed in Icelandic saga literature, while Emily Lethbridge's interactive Saga Map project provides an invaluable reference point for the study of palimpsestic sagascapes (2016a/b).[2] Matthias Egeler (2016; 2015) links the sagas to geocritical approaches and Reinhard Hennig (2019) critically elucidates the memory of environmental and climactic change in the *Íslendingasögur*. On a more conceptual level,

Tatjana Jackson examines the sense(s) of directions reflected in the 'mental map of medieval Scandinavians as reflected in Old Norse-Icelandic texts' (Jackson 2009: 211) and Jürg Glauser raises more general questions about the social and mnemonic construction of space in Old Norse-Icelandic literature (Glauser 2000, 2007). There is therefore strong precedent for examining Icelandic sagas as documents of human geography which drew on material, temporal and spatial coordinates.[3]

The current article aims to contribute to these debates by delineating the processes by which the authors, compilers and redactors of specific sagas conceptualise place, space, topography, and geography. For just like physical, lived-in landscapes, a landscape in a literary text can 'create and naturalize the histories and identities inscribed upon it, and so simultaneously hides and makes evident social and historical formations' (Maus 2015: 223). The lengthy saga narratives often unfold such formations across several generations, and they do so from the local perspectives which also underlie the experience of landscapes.

This article investigates such issues in relation to *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, a text likely compiled in the first half of the thirteenth century – a time of 'conflict in Iceland, led by half a dozen families that struggled for political supremacy' (Santiago Barreiro 2015: 23).[4] In particular, the focus lies on how the saga describes the settlement of the Borgarfjǫrður area in the West of Iceland by Egill's father Skallagrímr, a passage which inscribes the settler's perspective and authority into the region. Barreiro stresses that Skallagrímr's land claim 'is much larger in *Egils saga* than in the oldest preserved version of *Landnámabók*' and that 'the saga likely exaggerates the claim to legitimate further rights by the inheritors' (Barreiro 2015: 24). This suggests a connection between the settlement and government of this agriculturally rich region in the ninth and tenth centuries, and a conscious viewpoint for the mapping which *Egils saga* presents. Furthermore, *Egils saga* narrates the settlement in light of Iceland's relationship with the broader North-Western Atlantic region. As William Sayers notes, '[t]he geographic range of the saga is impressive: Norway, Iceland, Great Britain, Sweden, and the eastern Baltic, or more precisely the Courland Peninsula [...]' are all remarked on and form part of a spatial awareness that by far exceeds the Borgarfjǫrður region (Sayers 2013: 363).

A close reading of the settlement episodes turns the focus towards the process of mapping, exposing how the text creates and orders space(s) and place(s) – and relations thereof. Methodologically, the current article relates its analysis to influential thinking in human geography (mapping) but also to cultural memory studies. The latter is a strand of research that is concerned with the 'interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts'

(Astrid Erll 2008: 2), and especially with how the past is conceptualised in particular contexts. In relating the two disciplines it is possible to trace how the settlement period was a productive reference point in the construction of an Icelandic past at the time at which *Egils saga* was written (more than two centuries after the conclusion of the historical *landnám*, which Ari Thorgilsson in his *Íslendingabók* says was complete by 930 CE), and how the *landnám* remains inscribed in the landscape long after the settlement-period.[5]

While much previous work (Egeler 2016, 2015; Lethbridge 2016a/b) focuses on particular places (mnemotopes) and place-lore, the current article proposes larger narrative-cognitive maps for the sagas, through which the texts interact with topographical and historical knowledge.[6] This ultimately suggests textual mnemotopographies: constructions of cultural landscapes encompassing social, temporal, spatial, material and mnemonic qualities, and which allow both places and space(s) to stand in dialogue with the past and cultural identity.[7] This novel approach aims to provide insight into how topographies and space in literary texts provide valuable information about social practices, cultural self-perception, and the interplay between a lived cultural memory and the inhabited landscape. This suggests that the *Íslendingasögur* may be read as conceptual maps 'offer[ing] the point of view of someone who dwells in a place' (Gillian R. Overing and Marijane Osborn 1994: xviii) or in a landscape. An introduction to this methodological framework will precede the textual analysis and outline the most important points developed in the argument.

Spatial Perspectives on Cultural Memory

Cultural memory studies have enjoyed considerable popularity in the humanities in the past 40 years. Although often referred to as a field, they are better characterised as a school of thought which operates through common tenets while utilising various sources and methodologies. Broadly speaking, cultural memory studies challenges historical perceptions of the past and turns our interest to 'the multiple ways [in which] groups of people in the Middle Ages remembered their past and to an investigation of what modes were preferred when reference was made to times gone by' as Pernille Hermann (2010: 69) outlines. One of cultural memory studies' central prerogatives is that shared memories bind a culture together synchronically (i.e. between contemporary inhabitants of a region) as well as diachronically (across time).[8] As such, it continuously influences cultural identity, whether on a local or on a national level.[9] This comprises perceptions of places and spaces as providing a link to the past and shapes our cognitive as well as physical interaction with the lived-in world. Rather

than trying to unearth 'historically accurate' depictions of, for example, the Icelandic settlement, a cultural memory approach thus examines the media (texts, maps etc.), discourses, and concepts which shaped the perception of the settlement period at particular points in time.

That memory is not solely related to time but also spatially grounded is outlined for the Scandinavian tradition by Jürg Glauser, who emphasises that here 'memory is pre-eminently associated with spatial modes of thought' (Glauser 2000: 19; also 2007). Such observations may have far-reaching implications for our understanding of how cultural memory operates. If cultural memory is both shaped by, and oscillates between, historical awareness and the material world, then the culturally binding experience of the past goes beyond individual places: it also encompasses how we order, navigate and experience whole landscapes.[10] After all, pre-modern Icelanders inhabited landscapes rather than isolated places. Mnemotopographies is a term coined here to denote the larger units which map the memory of a culture's past in order to capture this engagement more fully. Beyond individual mnemotopes, mnemotopographies provide an insight into how spatial, historical and cultural knowledge was ordered, how various places relate to each other, and how this organisation reflects specific outlooks.

Such mnemotopographies further provide opportunities for examining the interplay between narrative landscapes and human reactions to them. As Gurevich observes, 'Scandinavian topography is not based on purely geographical coordinates: it is saturated in emotional and religious significance, and geographical space represents at the same time religious-mythological space' (Gurevich 1985: 49). Yet both the topography of the lived-in landscape and that of narrative landscapes encompass more than the religious-mythological versus geographical space. In fact, we may add several other categories to Gurevich's dichotomy (geographical/religious-mythological): natural and man-made materiality, cognitive, heroic, toponomastic, or humorous engagements – a list that is by no means finite. Each saga reflects various concerns at the time of its (written) composition and many more may be added during the saga's oral and written transmission.[11]

In developing Gurevich's (1985: 102) arguments, David Harvey concludes that the medieval way of looking at space and time was relational and dialectical rather than absolute. Space and time did not exist 'outside and before experience'; they were given only in experience itself, of which they formed an indissoluble part, which could not be detached from the living 'fabric' (Harvey 1996: 214).

In other words, it was through the human experience of space and time (for example in listening to place-lore of familiar places) that these basic categories of human thought became meaningful. The current reading of *Egils saga* sees the saga's description of the land-taking period as such a relational mechanism: it helped the audience to situate themselves in the landscape they inhabited because it provided both spatial and temporal coordinates for the organisation of their landscape, their settlement, and their place-names.[12] A major process by which this was achieved was the 'culturisation of nature' - the naming, claiming and dividing of land - which took place during the settlement-period.

Yet throughout the centuries, this engagement was fluid rather than stable and each text presents a multitude of relational points. Lethbridge analyses the palimpsestic nature of both the physical and the saga landscapes and proposes that various layers of meaning are continuously inscribed over each other. Lethbridge terms the resulting experience of the material, lived-in landscapes through knowledge of the sagas' sagascapes (Lethbridge 2016: 55). She further asserts that these serve to 'make places memorable and to fix their relative, geographical position in people's minds [...]' (Lethbridge 2016: 76). It is to this discourse that the current article seeks to add a further angle by focussing less on the palimpsestic nature of these sagascapes and more on the spatial perspectives which they contain.

Just as cartographic maps are not accurate representations of all aspects of a lived-in landscape, narrative landscapes are also not simply mirror images of the lived-in Icelandic environment. That sagas like *Egils saga* draw on the appearance and geography of the lived-in Icelandic landscape is vital for the narrative to be credible.[13] Yet they are cultural and cognitive spaces in their own right, purporting certain power-structures, preferences and priorities deeply rooted in specific perspectives – evident, for instance, in Skallagrímr's large land claim in *Egils saga* (Barreiro, 2015: 24). References to places and place-names are therefore more than mere inventories. In some texts at least, they can create inversions and even result in a grotesque or ironic subtext, as Egeler (2018) argues for the late fourteenth century *Harðar saga* (a text which is arguably particularly concerned with place-names).

That originally topographically descriptive place-names may have been etymologically re-analysed to reflect the settler's presence is probable (see Egeler 2018: 81; Lethbridge 2016b, 60–68; McTurk 1994–197: 166–170). Although this is often connected to the *landnám*, the desire to map particular inhabitants' presence through place-names or place-lore is more wide-spread. Lethbridge stresses that 'people wrote themselves and their stories into the landscape by claiming land, naming it after themselves and events that

happened at particular places [...] and imprinting their lives upon it' (Lethbridge 2016: 56). Lethbridge's work has sharpened our sensitivity towards the readings of landscapes. Linking such observations to cultural memory studies further emphasises that time and space are social constructs, primarily experienced and never truly objective. For the medieval period, they also, as Harvey postulates, show an 'ultimate embeddedness in the materiality of the world' (Harvey 1996: 210). Such 'landscapes of memory', Gunnar Maus argues, are productive 'imaginative geographies' which 'arrange people and artefacts in a meaningful way' and create a 'relational space' for human experience (Maus 2015: 223).

This becomes particularly important in relation to the claiming of new land and the narration of the transformation of natural into cultural space. It is in this area that Humanities, as Hennig asserts, can outline 'the role of imaginations, values, meaning-making processes, and identities with regard to environmental behaviour' and spatio-temporal self-awareness (Hennig 2019: 324). In the case of the *terra nova* ('new land') Iceland, the land had to be quite literally mapped by the settlers and is transformed in accordance with their farming practices (for example through deforestation, see Hennig 2019). Examining depictions of this culturally defining process in individual *Íslendingasögur* can shed light on the perspective(s) a particular text exhibits in narrating this decisive event in Icelandic history. For this, one need not posit an anachronistic 'national awareness', nor an immediate creation of a 'distinctly Icelandic' culture, but merely acknowledge that *Egils saga* uses the settlement as a meaningful experience for a regional establishment of a new society in a hitherto uninhabited landscape.

Chartering the Future: Observations on the Settlement in *Egils saga*

Egils saga is frequently discussed with an interest in the skald Egill and his poetry or in its presumed author, Snorri Sturluson.[14] William Sayers posits that the 'narrative line of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* is [...] pervasively dominated by its larger-than-life protagonist and, from a more synchronic scholarly perspective, by themes of poetic creation, personal identity, self-promotion, material advancement, and litigation [...]' (Sayers 2015: 143). However, other areas of interest have emerged which consider the saga within the wider textual tradition of the *Íslendingasögur* (de Looze, Helgason, Poole and Tulinius 2015). Jesse Byock perceives of the *Íslendingasögur* 'as part of an anonymous tradition of social memory' which 'reveals deep concerns among medieval Icelanders with their cultural self-identity' and this clearly also pertains to *Egils saga* (Byock 2004: 299). For Byock, the sagas 'employ rather than invent a remembered past', and it is in this context that the depiction and evaluation of landscapes

becomes important (Byock 2004: 299). The durability of many landscape features, and the possibility to experience and conceptualize whole landscapes through mnemonic discourses, means that the past remains continuously meaningful for an ever-shifting present.

Although large parts of *Egils saga* do not take place in Iceland, there are interesting points to note in relation to the settlement-period, such as the land-taking in Borgarfjǫrðr, which is narrated with much care and vibrancy. Ármann Jakobsson points out that Egill and his family 'live at well-known farmsteads and eventually become the forebears of many well-known thirteenth-century historical figures' (Ármann Jakobsson 2011: 31). Their land-taking consequently signals the beginning of a spatial and genealogical presence that endures well after the events narrated in the saga, and a close reading of these passages reveal that they are instrumental in shaping the mapping of that area beyond their own family.[15] Given the length of the saga it is not possible to discuss the settlement narratives in full here; instead, a few noteworthy passages are considered.

Egill's grandfather Kveldúlfr and his father Skallagrímr set out from Norway with their extended family and companions on two ships. When feeling his death approach, Kveldúlfr demands that after his death, his coffin is thrown overboard, and insists that Skallagrímr (who commands the second ship) should make his home as near as possible to the place where the coffin comes ashore (Nordal 1933: 71; Jones 1960: 79). This is a common motif in settlement-narratives, which links land-taking with providence of prosperity. Skallagrímr is unaware of these happenings as the two ships get separated. The crew of the first ship, now headed by Grímr the Hálogalander, finds Kveldúlfr's coffin when they come ashore and bury it underneath a pile of stones on a headland (Nordal 1933: 71-72; Jones 1960: 79). Their first act on Icelandic soil is the burial of an important genealogical figure, and this already marks the place in which the family will later thrive. But at this stage, no acts of naming the landscape or of permanent settlement are mentioned – this appears reserved for Kveldúlfr's offspring, Skallagrímr. Hence the river they traverse is simply sú er kǫlluð Gufuá (Nordal 1933: 72; 'the one now called Gufuá', Jones 1960: 79). Unaware of the death of his father, Skallagrímr lands at a headland not far away, and he immediately appears to name the place: 'kom þar at landi, er nes mikit gekk í sæ út, ok eið mjótt fyrir ofan nesit, ok báru þár farm af; þat kǫlluðu þeir Knarrarnes' (Nordal 1933: 72); 'They carried their cargo ashore there, calling the place Knarrarnes' (Jones 1960: 79).

Immediately after, Skallagrímr sets out to explore the land, which eventually leads him to discover the whereabouts of Grímr the Hálogalander and his companions. The reunion

is marked by the revelation about his father's death and the picking of the first permanent settlement site near the coffin: 'síðan fylgðu þeir Skalla-Grími þar til, ok syndisk honum svá, sem þaðan myndi skammt á brott, þar er bólstaðargørð góð myndi vera' (Nordal 1933: 73); 'later they led him to the place, and it looked to him as though just a short way off would be a fine place to raise a home' (Jones 1960: 80). Skallagrímr builds his first home, Borg, near this spot and names the nearby firth and region Borgarfjǫrðr. The farmland is marked out by the rivers flowing to the sea and thus possesses natural borders – a stark reminder that even at this early stage of settlement in the area, land is clearly divided through (permanent) natural boundaries. Skallagrímr then allocates the nearby land to his companion, Grímr the Hálogalander, after whom the river Grímsá is named. Such relational naming strategies in which natural features are named after settlers or in relation to settlements are widespread in *Egils saga*. Whether or not they reflect genuine eponymic naming going back to the settlement period is hard to determine with confidence. Yet for the audience of the saga they form part of a mnemonic landscape that goes beyond individual places and incorporates both man-made and natural features.

The saga also employs other naming strategies. For example, as the settlers name the natural features surrounding them, their encounters with the local fauna are memorialised: þar skammt út frá skarsk inn vík ein eigi mikill; fundu þeir þar andir margar ok kǫlluðu Andakíl, en Andakílsá, er þar fell til sjóvar (Nordal 1933: 73); 'A short way further down there stretched inland a not very big arm of water where they found a lot of ducks, so they called it Andakíl, and Andakílsá the river which flows into the sea there' (Jones 1960: 80).[16] Travelling down to the sea on the northern headland they catch some swans and call the place Álftanes (Nordal 1933: 73; Jones 1960: 80).[17] Much like the eponymic place-names, encounters with the natural world that have no lasting quality are therefore inscribed into the toponymy of the settlement. The saga links these to the first experiences of the settlers, yet they can hardly be seen to create culturally engaging mnemotopes. They nevertheless create relational spaces, as they too become intimately linked with the exploration of the region by the settlers.

Skallagrímr continues to give land to the members of his household and most of them provide eponyms for their homes (Nordal 1933: 73-74; Jones 1960: 80). Although these names have no explicit reference to Egill's family, the name-givers' association with his household and Skallagrímr's 'giving of land' may be a strong one. The same pattern is evident in relation to various new settlers arriving from Norway, whom Skallagrímr hosts over the

winter months before allocating land to them. In this way Skallagrímr shapes the settlement not just by providing place-names and erecting material structures, but also by determining future settlement patterns - not to mention forging the alliances which become important later in the narrative. Barreiro argues that in *Egils saga* 'the settlement is used to create an ideological statement about the legitimacy of Úlf's descendants' (Barreiro 2015: 24). Since 'wealth ultimately depended on land control' (Barreiro 2015: 31), the giving of land and the chartering of settlement patterns is of equal importance to naming places. From this perspective, the mnemotopography of Borgarfjǫrðr as a region would not simply commemorate the settlement period, but also the power which Egill's family held in the following centuries.

Skallagrímr also extends his own settlement, proceeding to build three more farmhouses, each marking a particularly profitable location. He builds a second farm at Álftanes from which his men go out fishing and seal hunting and where they gather driftwood. At the third farm at Akrar island driftwood is in great supply and stranded whales are plentiful. Skallagrímr's fourth farmstead is built on the high grounds on Grísartunga (named after the herdsman Gríss) as he notices that the livestock grazing there over the summer are bigger and hardier (Nordal 1933: 75–76; Jones 1960: 81–82). Not surprisingly, the locations of the farms are thus a clear response to the natural habitat, with both topographical and geographical knowledge playing a part in the settlement. The narrative hence marks not just the culturization of the land but an intimate observance of it, as well as a clear agenda: establishing the most profitable settlement. Skallagrímr does not simply rely on providence (as perhaps first suggested) but views the natural landscape as a resource for laying the foundation for regional authority. From this angle, natural and cultural environments are intimately connected, responding to each other rather than opposing each other. And both Skallagrímr and the saga appear to have a clear trajectory when mapping the land. On a narrative level, the condensed, chronological narration of the settlement in *Egils saga* allows the audience to follow the process as it unfolds. Furthermore, the audience expands (or reinforces) their own spatial knowledge through a narrative which reflects the settler's growing knowledge of natural resources and their drawing of boundaries: the view of the landscape expands with the settlement.

Even when his settlement is established, Skallagrímr continues to investigate the landscape:

> Skalla-Grímr kannaði land upp um herað; fór fyrst inn með Borgarfirði, til þess er fjǫrðinn þraut, en síðan með ánni fyrir vestan, er hann kallaði Hvítá, því at þeir fǫrunautar hǫfðu eigi sét fyrr vǫtn þau, er ór jǫklum hǫfðu fallit; þótti þeim áin undarliga lit. þeir fóru upp með Hvítá, til þess er sú á varð fyrir þeim, er fell af norðri frá fjǫllum: þá kǫlludu þeir Norðrá, ok fóru upp með þeiri á, til þess er enn varð á fyrir þeim, ok var þat lítit vatnfall. Fóru þeir yfir á þá ok enn upp með Norðrá: sá þá brátt, hvar en litla áin fell ór gljúfrum, ok kǫlluðu þá Gljúfrá. Síðan fóru þeir yfir Norðrá ok fóru aptr enn til Hvítár ok upp með henni: varð þá enn brátt á, sú er þvers varð, fyrir þeim ok fell í Hvítá; þá kǫlluðu þeir Þverá. þeir urðu þess varir, at þar var hvert vatn fullt af fiskum (Nordal 1933: 74-75).

> Skallagrímr explored the countryside inland over the whole area, proceeding in along Borgarfjörd first till the firth came to an end, and thereafter west along the river he named Hvítá (for those comrades had never before seen waters which had run off glaciers: the river struck them as a most peculiar colour). They continued up along Hvítá until they were confronted by a river flowing from the mountains to the north. This they named Nordrá, then kept up along it till once more there was a river in front of them – this time a small stream. Fording it, they continued once more up along Nordrá, and soon saw where the small stream ran out of some ravine, so called it Gljúfrá. Later they crossed Nordrá, returned to Hvítá, and continued up along it. Soon there appeared yet another river in front of them, which crossed their path and ran into Hvítá. This they called Thverá.[18] They came to know that all the waters there were full of fish (Jones 1960: 81).

Several points are worth noting in this short passage, not least the retrospective comment on the abundance of fish by the narrator, a fact not yet discovered by the explorers. The mapping and naming of what appears to be a sizable riverine landscape is ostensibly carried out in one act of exploration and onomastic appropriation. The names are reliant on the route taken and establish a relational grid in which names echo momentary experience: Norðrá ('North-River') was approached from the south; it is named in relation to a momentary position and to the other river previously named. Various naming strategies (appearance, geographic relation, and position in the landscape) are employed here. The saga hence memorialises not only the first journey through the riverine system but also the experience of the settlers and their perspectives. It is in larger topographies like this one, and perhaps especially in relation to rivers, that the much broader focus of mnemotopographies helps to explain the experience of humans in a landscape that is not simply an agglomerate of places, but also functions through relational space.

In a meta-textual comment, the episode also entails a temporal perspective. The narrative voice (which also commented on the rivers' abundance of fish) further comments on the settler's apparent unfamiliarity with glacial water. Whether or not this is historically plausible is of little concern here, as the saga clearly asserts differing horizons of knowledge about the landscape.[19] What is familiar to the narrator is remarkable for the settlers. This is a minor detail in the saga, but one which explicitly exposes the different perspectives – new settler versus settled Icelander – which the protagonists and the narrator occupy, and this draws attention to the narrative construction of the saga. The conceptualisation of places and even spaces functions within time and place-specific horizons of knowledge and therefore is always reliant on particular perspectives.

In their totality, the episodes discussed suggest that, as Denis Cosgrove argues, ''landscape' is primarily a 'way of seeing', through which parts of the European population commented on social relations, and [which] emphasises the importance of 'myth', 'memory', and 'meaning' for the relationship between landscape and human beings' (Cosgrove 2008: 20–21). In the saga narratives, this way of seeing becomes evident in the various strategies through which the settlers establish themselves in the region. As is evident from the excerpts quoted so far, the saga employs the settlement narrative as a backdrop against which Egill's own life is set and clearly links his endeavours with the map his forebears had started to create. This is evident when Egill returns from one of his exploits at the same time as Ketill Gufa comes to Iceland: '[...] þá var heraðit albyggt; váru þá andaðir allir landnámamenn, en synir þeira lifðu eða sonarsynir, ok bjuggu þeir þá í heraði' (Nordal 1933: 240); '[...] by then the countryside was fully settled. All the original settlers, indeed, were dead but their sons or son's sons were alive and living there in the neighbourhood' (Jones 1960: 200). This transition in generational terms is mirrored by a changed – fully settled, mapped, and divided – landscape. Ketill Gufa's journey, for example, draws on existing place names; he moves around territory familiar from the previous scenes and is at first unable to find a place to settle, as all suitable land is already taken. His struggle, then, is to establish a profitable household in relation to the first wave of settlement, not to navigate and make habitable yet uncultivated land.

At this stage in the settlement, only a conflict with another settler, Þórðr Lambason, creates new place-names. When Ketill Gufa's slaves cause destruction to Þórðr's farm they are hunted down. They flee to skerries which are then named after them (Nordal 1933: 241; Jones 1960: 201). However, the skerries are land that cannot be settled permanently, and they

are ostensibly only named because of events related to them bring them into the social sphere: it is the human interaction with the landscape which continues to extend the narrative (and cognitive) map of the settled area. That such marginal, uninhabitable places are named after people at the bottom of Icelandic society may not be a coincidence. Further close readings of the creation of space(s) in saga literature by characters pertaining to different social strata may draw closer attention to social power structures reflected in the power to name, claim, and farm places. This may unearth even further perspectives on spaces, as would closer analyses from gendered viewpoints.[20]

Egils saga appears to suggest that the naming of the landscape was not completed when the settlement period was over. Events – predominantly killings – could still lead to places being named, a custom which appears universal in outlook. In relation to outlaw sagas (which present a complex and charged interplay between social and natural spaces), Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough argues 'that descriptions of geography within such texts not only shape the plot, but also contribute towards the complexity of the narrative layers and the characterisation of the saga protagonists' (Barraclough 2010: 365). In literature, both cultural spaces (e.g. settlements or religious places) and nature/wilderness are narratively constructed (i.e. always already part of a semiotic system), but it remains to shed light on the conceptualisations of these apparent antonyms in specific texts.

Conclusion

Egils saga outlines a way of ordering both the past and the landscape geographically, chronologically, and culturally. This enables the past and present inhabitants of the landscape to situate themselves in a broader network of self-reflexive knowledge about the land they inhabit, and to experience the acquisition of this knowledge by the settlers. Yet it becomes clear that:

> [t]he sagas were not merely storehouses of memories neutrally keeping memories for posterity. They had a mediating function as well, working as a written space where memories, apart from taking permanent form, were exposed or side-lined, and organized by the use of literary patterns and techniques (Hermann 2010: 70).

We can therefore posit specific artistic choices for individual sagas, and indeed Barreiro concludes that 'the author of Egla seems to have made specific choices on how to retell the past' (Barreiro 2015: 39). The authors and redactors may further have made informed choices

when narrating the transformation of an unchartered territory into inhabited space and, in turn, into a mnemotopography of the settlement. Ian Wyatt proposes that topographic references form part of the 'narrative Grammar' of the *Íslendingasögur* and that saga landscapes act as literary devices deliberately employed by the saga author to direct the action of their audience (Wyatt 2004: 273). In addition, the relational construction of spaces and places must also be acknowledged to more fully understand the role saga landscapes played in cultural discourses. Narrative landscapes must therefore be studied beyond their physical components and onomastic references and with an eye to 'interrelated roles (of) material forms, practices, representations and subjective experiences' (Remma and Kasemets 2019: 1). Drawing attention to individual contexts, perspectives and agendas is a first step into this direction.

Both in its onomastic, geographical and topographical knowledge, *Egils saga* reflects Harvey's view that the experience of space and time in the medieval period 'defined a particular sense of situatedness and of positionality of human beings in relation to the world' (Harvey 1996: 214). In *Egils saga*, this at once encompasses the immediate lived-in landscape (i.e. the local geography and topography of the region) and the wider North-Western sphere. This perhaps reflects the multi-layered cultural identity of the settlers as they chart their landscape, travel abroad, and forge interpersonal relations. Harley posits that maps are 'as much a commentary on the social structure of a particular nation or place as on its topography', and that studying pre-modern texts as narrative maps reveals historical perspectives before the emergence of nation states (Harley 1989: 6). In the future, it remains to be investigated how such cognitive mapping is linked to other functions which *Egils saga* may have held: to entertain and amuse, to subvert, to cultivate historical awareness, and to think about the founding of Icelandic culture. In such a broader view, the complex ways in which 'society creates space, and space creates society' (Rösli 2018: 274) can more adequately be addressed.

Notes

[1] This article was written during a post-doctoral research project funded by the British Academy (grant number pf170042). I would like to thank the editors and especially the anonymous reviewers for their generous comments on earlier drafts.

[2] 'Palimpsestic' generally denotes manuscript pages on which previous writing was erased so that they could be written on again, with the original text sometimes visible underneath. The term has been widely adopted in landscape studies (particularly in landscape archaeology) to denote landscapes and places made up of several layers of human traces.

[3] A similar interest has arisen in connection with Nordic folklore, for which Terry Gunnell proposes that folk tales and legends 'can serve as documents of human geography' and help us gain an 'understanding of the world-view in earlier times' (Gunnell 2009: 305).

[4] *Egils saga* is extant in several manuscripts, the earliest being M (Möðruvallabók, Arnam. 132 fol.), W (Wolfenbüttel) and K (Cod. Arnam. 453, 4 ^{t0}). Only K preserves the text in its entirety. The manuscripts are dated to the mid-fourteenth century (M and W) or later.

[5] One of the most vexed question in Scandinavian Studies is how reliable the *Íslendingasǫgur* are in terms of historical facts. The discussion is too complex to sketch in a footnote. Suffice it to say that in the medieval period these sagas formed part of a historiographical discourse. As such, history is used here to refer to medieval conceptions of the past extant in *Egils saga*, while cultural memory denotes my own, modern approach to the sources which stresses that regardless of factual accuracy, the past narrated in texts like *Egils saga* had a binding, affective function within Icelandic cultural identity.

[6] 'Mnemotope' is used here to refer to 'memory-places' (from Ancient Greek: *mnemo-* 'memory' and *topos* 'place'), i.e. places where humans feel specific memories are embodied, in the widest possible sense. It is here employed in line with Jan Assmann's use (1992) of the term, where it denotes a physical place at which people may have (peseudo-)historical experiences.

[7] The term 'mnemotopographies' is coined here to expand the existing term mnemotope (see note 6). It refers to the larger topographies that are involved in the processes of sense-making much the same way as mnemotopes are: by stimulating a human response to certain features that is related to our construction of the past.

[8] See also Jan Assmann's idea of a 'connective structure' (Assmann 1992: 16-17).

[9] The definition of culture in this context is a difficult one and, unfortunately, is too often understood as including a national(istic) undertone. I would argue that a broad definition such as people characterised by common ideas, social norms, and self-perception is more applicable in this context, and acknowledge that one person may participate in several (sub-)cultures. Furthermore, regional variation and differences in gender and social status ('class' in modern terms) need also be considered. The article does therefore not argue for an abstract, homogenous idea of 'Icelandicness' in these sources, but proposes various ways in which a new and distinct Icelandic self-perception is formed.

[10] Lived-in landscape here denotes the physical landscape of Iceland and is used to distinguish this from the narrative landscapes created in texts and stories. The latter of course draw heavily on the former, but they always incorporate a certain perspective co-inscribed by the authors/redactors/transmitters of the texts.

[11] For this see Torsten Capelle and Susanne Kramarz-Bein (2010: 233).

[12] Of course, *Egils saga* was (and is) enjoyed outside the immediate area in which its narrative is set, but a basic familiarity with the geography and topography of the region (through experience or media) may still be proposed.

[13] The term 'forebears' is used here not in the sense of direct familial descendants, but in a broader understanding which encompasses a sense of descending from the settlers.

[14] Snorri's authorship cannot be proven but is often assumed (for this see Laurence de Looze, Jón Karl Helgason, Russell Poole, and Torfi H. Tulinius, eds. (2015)).

[15] The importance of the genealogies in the settlement narratives for asserting a presence in European history is outlined by Margaret Clunies Ross (1993). It would prove interesting to consider these genealogies alongside the settlement narratives to see how spatial and temporal, local and international factors play into the textual construction of this new society.

[16] In relation to toponyms referencing wild animals it may also be interesting to examine whether these are linked to cognitive toponymy, i.e. whether landscape features resemble body parts of particular animals when viewed from certain angles.

[17] For information about the places' use in other sagas, as well as on their geographic position, see http://sagamap.hi.is/is/# [accessed on 6. 12. 2019].

[18] *Þver-á* can mean 'side river, or tributary river', but the *Þver* prefix does have a general meaning of 'crossing, traversing' (Zoëga 1910: 521).

[19] Jones does not think that an unfamiliarity of Norwegian settlers with glacial water is plausible (Jones 1960: 246).

[20] I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to these underlying social perspectives.

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